

ARE THESE WHOLE FOODS MAKING YOU SICK?¹

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Eating foods in their natural state is usually a great idea. After all, whole foods are full of essential nutrients that our bodies need to stay healthy. But what you don't hear about the common foods on this list is that they're not for everyone. Find out whether these whole foods could be making you sick.

Milk

According to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control (CDC), eight food groups are responsible for 90 percent of food allergies. Cow's milk is one of them. Symptoms of milk allergy can include hives, vomiting, difficulty breathing, chronic ear and sinus infections, skin rashes, postnasal drip, chronic cough, abdominal cramping, and diarrhea. Not only is milk one of the most common allergens, it's also the source of one of the most common food intolerances. An estimated 70 percent of people worldwide are lactose intolerant, meaning they lack an enzyme known as lactase, which is necessary for digesting the lactose in milk. Symptoms of lactose intolerance include bloating, cramping, nausea, gas, and diarrhea.

Nonorganic milk may also contain hormone, pesticide, and antibiotic residues, which can contribute to all sorts of health problems. And consider this: Countries with the highest rates of dairy consumption also have much higher rates of heart disease and cancer. Finally, there's considerable research that suggests that dairy consumption is linked to an increased risk of both prostate and ovarian cancer.

What you can do: If you're lactose intolerant and don't want to exclude dairy from your diet, consider lactase supplements, which are easy to find in most drugstores, are affordable, and don't require a prescription. Many brands are prepackaged in single doses that are perfect for tucking into your purse or wallet.

If you're allergic to cow's milk, it's usually best to avoid milk and milk products altogether. Some excellent substitutes include soy milk, almond and other nut-based milks, oat milk, and rice milk (the least allergenic option). Be aware that these milk substitutes don't provide the same nutrition as cow's milk, which is a good source of calcium, protein, and (fortified) vitamins A and D. Goat's milk is another nutritionally sound option, if you can find it. Although food researchers don't know why, many people who are allergic to cow's milk can tolerate goat's milk, which is full of protein, phosphorus, riboflavin (vitamin B2), and potassium. Look for goat's milk in the dairy case at your local health food store.

Cauliflower

Cauliflower is rich in purines, a substance that occurs naturally in a number of animal and plant foods. Normally, our bodies convert purines into uric acid, which is then eliminated through the kidneys. However, some people have difficulty processing the uric acid. This buildup can cause uric acid crystals to form in the connective tissues and/or in the joints, triggering pain, inflammation, and gout. In addition, an excess accumulation of uric acid can contribute to the formation of kidney stones. Foods high in purines don't necessarily cause gout on their own, but

¹ Care2, healthy & green living, September 20, 2010

numerous studies point to purine-rich diets, particularly when combined with high levels of protein, as a significant contributing factor in causing flare-ups.

What you can do: Plant purines – as opposed to animal purines – seem to be less problematic in contributing to gout, but if you suffer from the condition, you may benefit from decreasing your daily purine intake to 100 to 150 milligrams. Moderate consumption of cauliflower on its own usually isn't problematic, although when paired with regular meat, poultry, and seafood-based meals, it can tip the scales for sensitive individuals. As a test, omit cauliflower and substitute its cruciferous cousins, broccoli and cabbage, which don't contain measurable levels of purines.

Eggs

Along with milk, eggs are on the list of the top eight food allergens. Symptoms of egg allergy usually occur within minutes of eating eggs or food containing eggs, but they can take up to a few hours to appear. Symptoms typically disappear within 24 hours (usually much sooner). They can include hives; swelling around the mouth; abdominal cramping; diarrhea; vomiting; sneezing; coughing; difficulty breathing; and itchy, watery eyes. In rare cases, egg allergy has caused anaphylactic shock.

In Chinese medicine, eggs are thought to contribute to excess mucus in some people, which, according to Paul Pitchford, author of *Healing With Whole Foods*, can lead to gall bladder obstruction and impaired liver function. Indeed, research indicates that eggs may worsen gallbladder disease. One common theory: Allergenic substances in eggs cause inflammation in the bile ducts, reducing the flow of bile from the gallbladder and contributing to the formation of gallstones. A study published in the February 2009 edition of *Diabetes Care*, the journal of the American Diabetes Association, found an increased risk of developing type 2 diabetes among men and women who ate eggs daily.

Although the incidence of salmonella in eggs is quite low, eggs are so prevalent in the American diet that it's still a major problem, resulting in 79,000 cases of food-borne illness and 30 deaths every year. Healthy people who contract salmonella poisoning usually recover quickly. However, elderly people, babies, and those with compromised immune systems (such as cancer or HIV patients) face greater risk. Symptoms of salmonella poisoning include abdominal pain, diarrhea, vomiting, and fever. To avoid salmonella, keep eggs refrigerated, discard eggs that are dirty or cracked, and cook eggs thoroughly—salmonella bacteria is killed by cooking. Also avoid products that contain raw eggs, such as cookie dough.

What you can do: There are a number of excellent egg-free substitutes that are widely available, depending on your needs.

- For baking: Substitute one small banana, 1/4 cup applesauce, or 1/4 cup pureed prunes for one egg.
- For scrambling: Sub 1/4 cup firm tofu for one egg.
- For general purpose: Sub equal parts egg replacer for eggs. Commercial egg replacers work well, but check the ingredients to confirm that the product isn't made with eggs. Egg Beaters is one brand that's made from egg whites.

Nightshades

Nightshades are a plant family that includes tomatoes, potatoes, eggplant, hot peppers, and sweet bell peppers. Spices and condiments derived from these foods, including cayenne, paprika, and Tabasco sauce, also fall into the nightshade family. Nightshades can aggravate joint inflammation, so many health professionals tell patients with all types of arthritis to steer clear of these foods, although it seems that only certain people are sensitive. Nightshades contain a toxic alkaloid called solanine, which is normally destroyed in the intestines. Solanine irritates the gastrointestinal tract and can also cause diarrhea, headache, and vomiting.

What you can do: Avoid green tomatoes, green potatoes, and sprouted potatoes, which contain higher levels of toxic alkaloids. Cooking nightshades reduces their alkaloid content by 40 to 50 percent, but if you're sensitive, you might try eliminating them from your diet temporarily. Experts are split on the amount of time it takes to see true results; some say two to three weeks is a good trial; others recommend a minimum of six weeks. If you're eliminating nightshades from your diet, it's the perfect time to ramp up your intake of foods that fight inflammation, particularly if you're prone to arthritis. Try these picks for super anti-inflammatory power: foods rich in omega-3 fatty acids, including flaxseed, walnuts, salmon, mackerel and sardines; pineapple; and onion, garlic, ginger, and turmeric.

Wheat

Remember that list of the top eight allergenic foods? Wheat makes an appearance on that list, too. Symptoms of wheat allergy include itchy mouth or throat; hives; nasal congestion; difficulty breathing; itchy, watery eyes; abdominal cramping; nausea; vomiting; and diarrhea. In extreme cases, wheat allergy can cause anaphylaxis. Wheat contains several types of protein, including gluten. Gluten sensitivity or intolerance is fairly common. Some people who are merely sensitive to gluten can tolerate wheat and wheat products with minor discomfort; symptoms include postnasal drip, cough, and phlegm. Wheat gluten is also a common trigger for pain in patients with rheumatoid arthritis.

However, gluten can cause serious problems for people with celiac disease, a chronic digestive disorder in which gluten can't be tolerated. Gluten triggers inflammation in the small intestine in these individuals, which can lead to poor nutrient absorption in addition to gastrointestinal damage. Many neurological conditions have been linked to nutrient deficiency due to gluten intolerance. Jessica Black, author of *The Anti-Inflammation Diet and Recipe Book*, writes, "If you suffer from any neurological condition, it is worth a four-week trial of gluten avoidance."

Whole wheat also contains oxalates, substances which occur naturally in plants and people. But when oxalates reach high levels in the body, they can crystallize and contribute to the formation of kidney stones. Some medical and health professionals recommend restricting oxalate consumption for people with a history of kidney stones, but this is probably only helpful in patients who absorb excess oxalate in the first place. This sometimes occurs when an individual isn't getting enough calcium, since oxalate reduces the body's absorption of calcium.

What you can do: Wheat is so widespread it can be hard to avoid. If you have wheat allergy, avoid foods that list any of the following as ingredients: wheat flour, wheat germ, wheat starch, bran, modified food starch, farina, spelt, and semolina. Amaranth, garbanzo, quinoa, rice, and soy flours are gluten-free and can all be substituted for wheat flour in equal measure. For each cup, blend with one tablespoon of arrowroot powder, which acts as a binding agent. You can find arrowroot powder in the spice section or baking aisle of your local grocery.

Grapefruit

Compounds found in grapefruit and grapefruit juice in particular block an enzyme that helps the body metabolize and regulate certain common drugs. This can cause these drugs to stay in your system longer, lingering in your intestines and liver and even boosting the level of the drug in your body to dangerous levels. Many drugs can be affected by grapefruit or grapefruit juice, from certain allergy medications and cholesterol-lowering statin drugs to medications used to treat depression, migraines, high blood pressure, HIV, and more. To be safe, ask your doctor or pharmacist whether grapefruit products are contraindicated with your medications. Grapefruit juice has also been linked to an increased risk of developing kidney stones – and in some people, grapefruit and other citrus fruits can trigger joint inflammation, aggravating arthritis.

What you can do: Avoid grapefruit and grapefruit juice, and try other fresh fruits and freshly squeezed juices instead. Some excellent whole fruit substitutes include mangos, pears, watermelon, kiwis, and berries. If you miss the “kick” of grapefruit juice, try fresh carrot-ginger juice, which is a common blend at juice bars and health food stores and is easy to make at home, even without a juicer: For one serving, blend three large carrots and one slice of fresh ginger root (about a quarter-inch thick), and strain the liquid into a glass, reserving the pulp.